

## Beyond the Text: Feminist Psychoanalysis and Cognitive Poetics Analysis of Shaila Abdullah's *Amulet for the Caged Dove*

Syeda Anam Azhar<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Huma Batool<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>PhD Scholar, Department of English, Air University, Islamabad

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of English, Air University, Islamabad

Correspondence Email: [humbatool2019@gmail.com](mailto:humbatool2019@gmail.com)

### Abstract

This study employs a novel perspective of cognitive poetics and feminist psychoanalysis to examine the cognitive and emotional processes involved in readers' interpretation of Shaila Abdullah's *Amulet for the Caged Dove*. By integrating schema theory, we explore how readers' prior experiences and knowledge shape their understanding of gender dynamics and psychological abuse within the narrative. Utilizing Nancy Chodorow's notion of unconscious gender development, this study investigates the ways in which pre-existing schemas related to power dynamics and gender are activated and transformed during the reading process. Drawing upon Peter Stockwell's six types of schema management, we evaluate how readers construct their interpretation of gender violence by integrating their existing schemas with new schemas, as informed by the text. The findings reveal that the cognitive processes involved in schema management play a crucial role in normalizing and perpetuating patriarchal structures and psychological abuse in Pakistani society. By understanding these cognitive mechanisms, this study contributes to our understanding of how literature can both reinforce and challenge societal norms and stereotypes.

### Keywords:

Cognitive Poetics, Schema Theory, Psychoanalytic Feminism, Gender Dynamics, Psychological Abuse

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**1. Introduction**

Research in literature has employed different literary theories, that have long informed the way readers engage with texts and have provided structured approaches to analyze language, context, characters and themes (Rahim Nouri & Ghandehariun, 2020; Wenski, 2021; Kurnia et al., 2021; Razia & Maan, 2022; Ammar & Ahmad, 2022; Arnetta & Amelia, 2022; Ali et al., 2023; Altaf et al., 2024). In recent years, the language of literature has emerged as a compelling area of interest for linguists, literary stylists, and cognitive scientists expanding beyond the traditional domain of literary critics. The use of linguistic theories across different genres of literature often provides significant insights, enhancing our grasp of various forms of literary works (Siregar et al., 2020; Ampofo et al., 2020; Batool et al., 2022; Sikander et al., 2022; Gohar et al., 2023; Batool et al., 2024)

Parallel to this, Cognitive Poetics emerged as a contemporary field that combines literary analysis and cognitive science for analyzing literary texts, focusing on how the human mind processes and interprets information (Stockwell, 2002; Gavins, 2007; Tsur, 2008; Stockwell, 2015). By scrutinizing the cognitive activities of readers, cognitive poetics provides an innovative lens through which literary texts can be analyzed, uncovering the intricate relationship between the textual content and the reader's accumulated knowledge and experiential background. Stockwell (2006) asserts that cognitive poetics offers a broader lens through which literary analysis can be approached, emphasizing its 'predictive power' in generating meaningful interpretations. He posits that cognitive poetics analysis deepens our understanding of specific linguistic patterns that often go unnoticed or are entirely overlooked. Stockwell further argues that reading literature through this framework integrates "the dynamic and readerly aspects of texts" with the reader, with the reader, positioning them as "an inherent part of the analytical theory" (p. 136).

The field of cognitive poetics has recently explored a wide array of concepts pertaining to literary texts (Jaafar, 2020; Che, 2014; Bas, 2021; Altaf & Batool 2024; Umer et al., 2025). Their focus was on integrating schema theory and text world theory, and the studies combined image schemas and mental spaces to explore the cognitive processes involved in constructing literary meaning. In terms of literature, Bas (2021) applied cognitive poetic analysis to Kamal's *Silent Ship*, highlighting the importance of understanding the mental processes that shape both the writer's and reader's experiences, an approach applicable to any literary work. Similarly, Chen (2018) employed possible worlds theory to investigate *The Buddha of Suburbia*, highlighting the distinctive narrative that keep readers engaged

with the text. Based on the studies mentioned, it becomes pertinent for scholars to apply cognitive poetics in their interpretation of literary texts.

The current study examined the cognitive and affective mechanisms of readers involved in the interpretation of Shaila Abdullah's *Amulet for the Caged Dove* from feminist psychoanalytic perspective. For this purpose, the study employed schema theory as a methodological framework and explored the protagonist's mental state and response to psychological abuse in the short story *Amulet for the Caged Dove*, drawing on Nancy Chodorow's psychoanalytic feminist perspective with an emphasis on Freud's theory of the unconscious. According to Cook (1994), schema theory and literary theory complement each other, and he characterizes this process as a "dynamic interaction between linguistic and text structure from one angle and the schematic representation of the world from the other side" (p. 212).

In this context, the current study underscores the significance of consolidating the domains of cognitive poetics and feminist literary criticism in broadening the scope of literary analysis. This work deals with the readers' cognitive dimensions that underpin the reading and interpretation of a literary work from a feminist viewpoint. The study can serve as a pioneering methodology for comprehending how literature may either perpetuate or contest prevailing societal norms and stereotypes. Moreover, it also offers a systematic analysis by integrating cognitive tool with feminist perspective by demonstrating how readers' existing knowledge shapes their understanding of the text.

## **2. Problem Statement**

While much of the existing literature employs cognitive poetics from various perspectives, there remains a lack of academic research that integrates cognitive poetics and feminist literary criticism to explore gender, trauma, and societal expectations in literary texts. Therefore, this study aims to bridge this gap by examining the text *Amulet for the Caged Dove* within the comprehensive frameworks of schema theory and feminist psychoanalysis.

## **3. Research Questions**

1. In what ways do readers' pre-existing schemas concerning gender, power relations and psychological trauma impact their *interpretation of Amulet for the Caged Dove*?

2. What cognitive mechanisms are at play in readers' comprehension of the gendered dynamics and psychological trauma depicted within the text?
3. How does schema theory elucidate the mechanisms through which readers' interpretations may either uphold or subvert patriarchal frameworks?

#### **4. Research Objectives**

1. To investigate the significance of schema theory in elucidating readers' interpretations of *Amulet for the Caged Dove*.
2. To assess the cognitive mechanisms involved in readers' comprehension of gender dynamics and psychological trauma portrayed in the text.
3. To examine the ways in which readers' schemas may either perpetuate or contest patriarchal structures.

#### **5. Literature Review**

This section provides an overview of schema theory for literary analysis by citing studies relevant to cognitive poetics. Additionally, it highlights literary works explored through psychoanalytic feminism, establishing it as a significant field of research today. Appropriate studies have been cited on various approaches to cognitive poetics such as cognitive stylistics, mental space theory, schema theory, text world theory, and conceptual metaphor theory used for analyzing literary text. Lastly, to identify the gap this study aims to fill, the most relevant studies conducted on the selected text have been cited within the existing body of literature.

#### **6. Schema Theory for Literary Analysis**

Over the past few years, literary scholars have developed a profound interest in cognitive poetics and have applied several cognitive poetic methods to literary analysis (Chen, 2018). By using these approaches, researchers can generate new interpretations and analyses of literary texts from a fresh perspective. Ghaeli and Pirnajmuddin (2016) asserted that literary authors create meaning through metaphors, and explored the conceptual metaphor of LIFE IS A PLAY in David Mamet's plays *Sexual Perversity in Chicago* and *Glengarry Glen Ross*. They employed conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) to demonstrate how this metaphor is expressed both linguistically and thematically, reflecting Mamet's concern with societal issues and interpersonal relationships in America. Khajeh, Abdullah, and Hua (2014) examined Persian

metaphorical concepts related to food and questioned the author's claims of "embodiment." Their study revealed that dietary and culinary aspects in a society can reflect emotional temperaments and cultural values. They also highlighted that, despite some similarities with English, ANGER metaphors in Persian are distinct, suggesting the influence of Galenic Theory and Iranian Traditional Medicine Theory on Persian lifestyle and language.

According to Sohrabi and Pirnajmuddin (2017), Donne's poetry focuses on his efforts to establish a personal domain through the domain of love in his poetry. Drawing on Lakoff and Johnson's theories about childhood metaphors shaping our understanding of self, their study examined the cognitive foundations of Donne's self-metaphors. They explored how Donne's metaphors, influenced by imperial and colonial themes, related to communal and national identity, incorporating ideas from cognitive poetics and Edward Said's views on culture and imperialism. Barekat and Nosouhi (2016) employed two important cognitive poetics mechanisms i.e. image schemas and mental spaces to analyse Samuel Becket's *Watt* (1953). Fauconnier and Turner (2004) believed that the interplay between these mechanisms shapes logical and rational thinking. They hypothesized that disruptions in this interaction lead to irrational thoughts. So, by examining how image schemas and mental spaces interact in the protagonist Watt's mind, they explored how these disruptions contribute to the increasing disorder and eventual incoherence in Watt's speech. Chen (2018) explored the application of possible world theory, a very important category in cognitive poetics, to analyse the novel *The Buddha of Suburbia*. He examined the novel's unique narrative techniques, how readers engage with the text to create possible worlds and how these worlds reflect themes such as identity, racial discrimination and societal features.

The current study employed one of the important concepts of cognitive poetics, schema theory, for the analysis of the literary text *Amulet for the Caged Dove* (2005) by Shaila Abdullah. Jaafar (2020) defined schema "as a cognitive structure that constructs our knowledge of how we see the world around us" (p. 55). In his study, he used schema theory and text world theory, two important theories of cognitive poetics to analyze literary language. His study focused on the relationship between the text world and the discourse world, exploring how readers establish connections between the text world and the real world. By analyzing how readers use their own experiences and background knowledge to interpret texts, he demonstrated the integration of these theories using Wilfred Owen's *Strange Meeting*, Corbett Harrison's *In Winter* and the opening passage of David Lodge's

*Changing Places*. He also emphasized the influence of cognitive processes on reading and interpretation, focusing on the role of background knowledge and personal experience in understanding literary texts. Almufayrij (2020) conducted a study in three undergraduate classrooms at King Saud University with 51 students over a year (2018-2019) to address the challenges of inadequate schemata in Saudi students when studying English and American poetry. The study revealed that most students recognize the influence of social and cultural ideologies on comprehension, with 49% noting that their different backgrounds affect their ability to connect with the poems. Additionally, students are receptive to schema activation techniques to enhance their understanding of English and American poetry.

Studies (Zhao & Zhu, 2012; Che, 2014; Liu, 2015) demonstrate the importance of schema theory in enhancing reading skills and influencing reading comprehension. For example, Che (2014) carried out a case study on Newspaper reading and highlighted the importance of reading in language learning and daily life. A study by Liu (2015) showed the impact of schema on reading comprehension and having the appropriate schema significantly improves readers' performance in both immediate and delayed recalls. Khan et al. (2022) applied a methodological framework from cognitive poetics' text world theory to Ahmed Ali's *Twilight in Delhi*. They observed how discourse, text and sub-worlds create mental models that result in meanings and worldviews in Ahmed's novel. This work by Khan et al. helps researchers identify a gap by demonstrating the application of cognitive poetics methods in the Pakistani context. It highlights the need to apply various cognitive poetics methods to Pakistani literature.

## **7. Psychoanalytic Feminist Perspective as a Mode of Analysis**

The works of art and literature often address the impact of race, caste and sexuality on the lives of women. Among the various forms of literary research within feminism and gender studies, the feminist analysis of literary texts is highly esteemed. However, literary critics and theorists have frequently focused more on the physical forms of oppression in South Asian literature than on the psychological abuse and repression of women (Collins, 1996). Similarly, while feminist writers from South Asia and other third-world regions, such as Africa, have explored gender discrimination and prejudice, much of this work tends to emphasize issues related to class and race systems.

Although relatively rare, the psychoanalytic feminist study of literature has been explored by numerous literary critics and researchers, leading to many research papers and theses.

Hallab (1971) conducted a study on psychoanalytic criticism of Henry James' life and works. This psychoanalytic analysis uncovers the underlying meanings in James' works and examines James as a psychologist. By incorporating both methods of psychoanalysis, Hallab offers a detailed analysis of the classical writer's works from a Freudian perspective. Many female psychologists have worked on the feminine perspective of psychological development, both conscious and unconscious. Additionally, Elliott (2015), in her book titled *Psychoanalytic Theory*, dedicated an entire chapter to psychoanalytic feminism, discussing in detail various feminist psychoanalytic theorists. She covered those who extended and criticized Freud as well as those inspired by Lacanian psychoanalysis. In the chapter "From Chodorow to Butler," Elliott explored the conceptions of feminists about psychoanalysis and their reactions to it.

Chatterjee (2015) attempted to identify the "Plausibility of a Feminist Philosopher's Take on Freudian Analysis" (Chatterjee, 2015, p. 227). In this research, Chatterjee discussed the logical basis of Freudian discourse and examined how successfully feminist psychologist Irigaray (1977) highlighted its biases and loopholes. This work takes a critical stance on the Freudian conception of the unconscious and aims to identify the dialogue between French feminist psychoanalysts and Freud. A study by Blake (2009) is based on the contemporary feminist critique of psychoanalysis, particularly focusing on the works of Deleuze and Guattari (1983; 1987). This research aimed to understand certain aspects of Freudian psychoanalysis that are harmful to women. To this end, the feminist psychoanalyst Irigaray was included in the research to provide a contrasting viewpoint from a feminine perspective. Another classic piece of art, *The Scarlet Letter* by Hawthorne (1970), is analyzed using the framework of Freudian psychoanalysis (Isaogllu, 2015). The Turkish researcher analyzed the literary characters through the application of psychoanalytic theory. This research was based on Freud's theory of the unconscious and explored the patterns of repression, which it claimed were emerging from the imbalance between the ego, id, and superego (Isaogllu, 2015).

Tezi and Jamali (2006) combined the theoretical perspectives of Lacan and Kristeva for a "Psychoanalytic Feminist Reading of Daniel Defoe's Novels" (Tezi & Jamali, 2006, p. 1). In this study, the symbolic order of the female characters in Defoe's novels is analyzed from both Lacanian and Kristevian conceptions. They divided their comprehensive research into two parts, each consisting of five chapters. The first part deals with novels such as *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *Captain Singleton* (1720), where the feminine symbolic order is explored through detailed analysis. The second part consists of analyses



of *Moll Flanders* (1722) and *Colonel Jack* (1722), where femininity is studied from the perspective of the Imaginary, as discussed by both Lacan and Kristeva. The rediscovery of these classic literary works through a psychoanalytic feminist study is evidence of the interdisciplinary nature and uniqueness of this approach.

## **8. Shaila Abdullah's Amulet for the Caged Dove**

Only a few studies (Ashee, 2019; Roychoudhary, et al. 2016) have been conducted on Abdullah's *Amulet for the Caged Dove* (2005). Ashee (2019) conducted a comparative study on two Pakistani short fiction writers, Mueenudeen and Abdullah, using transitivity as the analytical framework. By employing Burton's guidelines (1982) and Mills' feminist transitivity analysis (2012), the study revealed that the female characters in Abdullah's stories are submissive and oppressed by a patriarchal society, remaining ineffective in changing their circumstances. In contrast, Mueenuddin's female protagonists strongly assert dominance over the male characters. Roychoudhary (2016) conducted a critical study on the short stories to examine their contribution to addressing, investigating and proposing appropriate solutions to women's problems in a patriarchal society. For this purpose, the author examined the narrative techniques, characterization, imagery and landscape in the works of Gokhale and Abdullah's *Amulet for the Caged Dove*. Both authors primarily deal with women's domestic lives in their works.

The current study used schema theory to examine the cognitive and emotional processes involved in interpreting the short story *Amulet for the Caged Dove*. It is important to note that no previous study analyzed the selected text from this perspective.

## **9. Research Methodology**

### **9.1. Research Design**

The primary focus of this paper is to explore how schema theory integrates with psychoanalytic feminist theory to analyze the literary text and reading processes of a Pakistani short story *Amulet for the Caged Dove*. The increased interest in interpretation and the relationship between the reader's background knowledge and the variability of interpretation often challenges the reader's existing schemas when schema theory is applied to literature (Jaafar, 2020). Schema theory is a robust cognitive framework that explains how individuals organize and process information using mental structures known as schemas (Bartlett, 1995; Piaget, 1952). These schemas are dynamic and evolve based on an individual's experiences, knowledge, and cultural background, influencing their



perception, memory, and thought processes (Meylani, 2024). According to Meylani (2024), the broad applicability of schema theory across multiple disciplines highlights its versatility and impact on academic research and practical applications. Consequently, the current study employs a qualitative method to explore the themes and topics depicted in the short story *Amulet for the Caged Dove*. This study asserts that gender dynamics and psychological abuse are identified through specific themes, applying schema theory within a theoretical framework based on psychoanalytical feminist theory.

## **10. Theoretical Framework**

### **10.1. Chodorow's Psychoanalytical Feminism**

In her feminist critique of Freud, Chodorow argues that psychoanalytic theories by Freud and other psychologists have always conceptualized women as a single specific category, which cannot represent all women. Furthermore, women are continuously compared to men, and their personalities are theorized in parallel to those of men (Chodorow, 1994). According to Chodorow (1994), Freud included women “as subjects in his theory of sexuality”, but he presented them through the lens of men’s experiences and later treated them merely as subjects of study (Chodorow, 1994, p. 4). In her discussion of Freud, she points out that a significant limitation of his representation of female sexuality is the neglect of the critical role mothers play in the sexual identification of their children. Another major limitation is that the female subjects are analyzed from a male perspective. Chodorow (1994) asserts that the theory addressing female sexuality must involve female subjects who resonate with women’s own experiences. Freud discusses women by deriving their nature from their sexual function, without distinguishing between ‘femininity’ and ‘female sexuality’ (Chodorow, 1994, p. 6).

According to Chodorow (1994), “hysteria in women from various backgrounds has a common cause linked to sexual repression or unwanted sexual advances” (p. 13). Other psychological disorders such as obsession are also rooted in unfulfilled sexual desires as Freud saw women as sexual objects rather than individuals. In her feminist psychoanalytic theory, Chodorow highlights the importance of the mother-daughter relationship, asserting that it is the key factor in gender identification and development, impacting personalities in childhood and throughout life (Chodorow, 1994). Chodorow (1994) highlights Freud’s observation that female sexual desires significantly contribute to their repression, especially within the context of gender construction in heterosexual relationships. Freud observed that educated women from highly moral families often experience guilt during

sexual encounters, which can lead to neurosis. Women played a very significant role in the development of Freud's theories and concepts. Freud identified the "causes of repression through symptoms which were often expressed in symbolic forms" (Chodorow, 1994, p. 19-20).

In her book, Chodorow (1994) examines the individuality and differences between men and women within heterosexual relationships. She explores the causes of repression by studying women's relationships with their parents, with a particular focus on the mother's role in the development of gender identity for both men and women. In the second chapter, Chodorow discusses heterosexual relationships as a form of compromise, providing a detailed analysis of how these compromising relationships are connected to women's unconscious repressions. This discussion establishes a foundation for the psychoanalytic feminist study of works by Pakistani female authors (Chodorow, 1994).

## **10.2. Schema Theory of Cognitive Poetics**

The term "schema" first appeared in 1932 in Sir Frederic Bartlett's works and was later expanded upon by Richard Anderson in 1990 (Rumelhart, 2017). Yule (2010) defined schema as "a conventional knowledge structure that exists in our memory" (p. 150). According to Anderson and Pearson (1984), schemas are mental representations of interrelated concepts, such as knowledge, beliefs and expectations connected to a specific field. For example, if you talk about a school, you don't need to specify details such as classrooms, teachers, students, desks, or chairs because they are assumed to be a part of our background knowledge. Stockwell (2006) identifies three ways by which a schema can change or evolve, these are accretions which refer to the addition of new details to the existing schema, then tuning which involves modifying the facts or relationships within the schema and finally restructuring which denotes the creation of new schemas. Stockwell summarized six types of schema management that will be used for the analysis (see Figure 1). According to Stockwell, schema preservation refers to the process by which routine daily conversations align new information with existing schematic knowledge encountered previously. On the other hand, schema reinforcement involves integrating new facts in a way that validates and strengthens existing schematic knowledge. Adding new facts to an existing schema occurs within the schema accretion, thereby expanding its scope and explanatory range. Therefore, in schema disruption an unexpected element or sequences within a text's conceptual content challenge a reader's existing knowledge structure (Altaf & Batool, 2024). Furthermore, schema refreshment refers to the process of updating a schema by redefining its components and relationships, and lastly, schema replacement

occurs when it becomes clear that the wrong schema has been used, necessitating a complete replacement with a new schema.

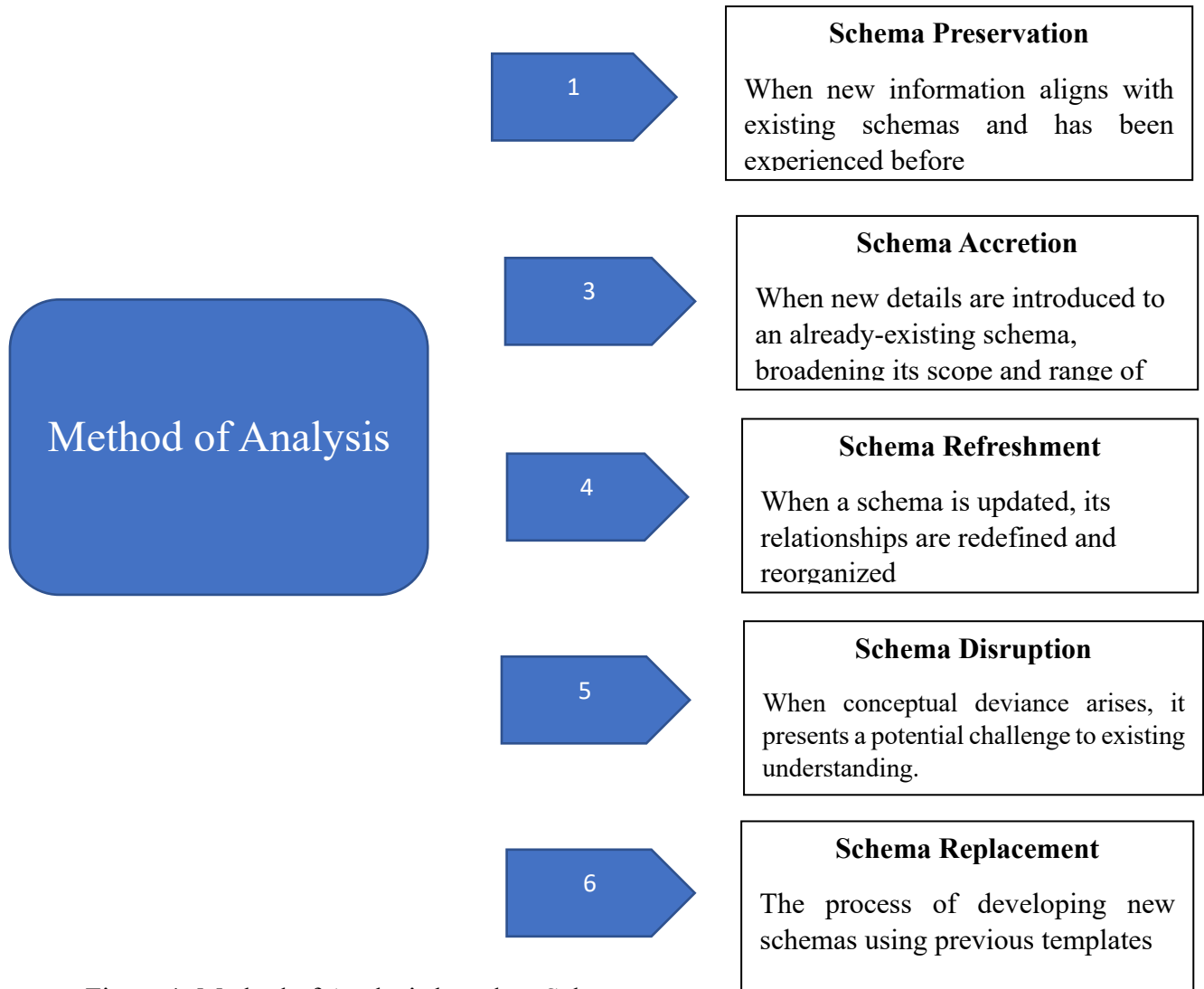


Figure 1. Method of Analysis based on Schema Theory

**11. Analysis and Discussion**

The short story *Amulet for the Caged Dove* from Abdullah's short stories collection *Beyond the Cayenne Wall* is based on the story of the young protagonist, a housewife, Tannu. The story is unfolding as the main character of the narrative, Tannu, tries to sleep. In the opening sentences of the story, imagery of night is described which gives a vivid description of gloominess, sadness and disparity by incorporating similes such as "tent-like dwelling" and "descended like a hawk". Night in the "tent-like dwelling" is not warm and welcoming, rather the idea of the night for Tannu is much bleaker, scary and dangerous. It can be linked to Jaafar's (2020) study on Wilfred Owen's *Strange Meeting* where the description of the meeting scene is portrayed using details like "fixed eyes", "distressful hands" and "dead smile". The study reveals that readers create a haunting image of the meeting scene based on their schematic knowledge.

It is of no surprise that the number of schemata which are relevant for the interpretation of *Amulet for the Caged Dove* activates when we consider the overall images evoked by the text. Tannu, while staying awake, tries to talk herself into sleep. The way she talks to herself, by calling her name and commanding herself to sleep, shows the lack of human connection and isolation. To interpret these images, readers need to refer to their knowledge about sleeping disorders and here readers activate their schema of sleeping disorders. According to Stockwell, if incoming facts are new but these facts help in strengthening and confirming schematic knowledge, their effect is therefore described as schema reinforcing (Stockwell, 2006, p. 107).

**11.1. Socio-Cultural and Patriarchal Schemas**

As the narrative progresses, cultural schemas lead readers to interpret Tannu's conditions in the patriarchal society of Pakistan and hence are termed as socio-cultural and patriarchal schemas. Therefore, in this part of the story, the readers are presented with irony as the most probable option i.e. medical help is avoided by her mother-in-law (Amma) who "tried all the totems and tricks known to her and her generation" most of the cures involved expensive routine of rare food items while one most important measure taken by Amma was "the amulet around Tannu's neck that Wali Baba prepared for her after fasting for seven days" (Abdullah, 2005, p. 2). This refers to schema refreshment as the schema is revised and recast which brings a schema change in the reader's mind (Stockwell, 2006). Based on the reader's already-built schemas related to patriarchal setup and different means of exercising and upholding the patriarchal norms, schema refreshment activates,

and the reader can relate to it because the roles and conducts of women can often be defined by conventional patriarchal norms in Pakistani culture, particularly within family structures.

Thus, the readers relying on the prior knowledge who are familiar with such norms may activate schemas relating to gender roles and patriarchy when Amma's actions are interpreted. Amma believed that through some "mystifying alchemy, she would influence the arrival of her elusive grandchild", and not the child of any gender but "grandson, to be precise". However, Amma did not stop there she repeated the argument again and again, repeating it several times a day, as she believed that "if she repeated it often enough, it would come to true" (Abdullah, 2005, p. 2). Amma's preference for a grandson over a grandchild serves as a stark reminder of this gender inequality. Hence, the statement "grandson, to be precise" implies that Tannu's status in the family might be dependent on her ability to deliver a male child. Amma's obsession with having a grandson may be interpreted by readers who experienced or witnessed such gender stereotypes as a reflection of deeply ingrained patriarchal norms.

The patriarchal society of Pakistan may lead readers to recognize the power dynamics at play, where women are typically conditioned to accept their roles and responsibilities without challenging the fairness or the oppressive nature of these positions. Readers might construct their mental image of Pakistani society where the protagonist Tannu is born and raised. However, the readers must have a wide range of prior knowledge about Pakistani society to conceptualize the scene. This situation can be related to Chen's (2018) study on Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*. It explores the themes of hybrid identity, racial discrimination and characteristic elements of the era by examining the text worlds and creating more possible worlds. In doing so, the readers create a mental image in their minds about the protagonist Karim's identity reflecting his British-Asian nationality. Thus, the readers having a background knowledge of British social life might relate to his identity crisis as a second-generation British Asian. Therefore, in both situations, readers' prior knowledge and experiences shape their understanding of the communities in which both protagonists are born and raised.

### **11.2. Psychological Repression as a Schemas**

When the readers relate the pervasive ways of Amma with spiritual practices, the subtle way of exerting power and control under the disguise of care and concern is revealed and thus activates the schema of psychological repression. Tannu is the subject of all the

“totems and tricks” and she does whatever she has been told. From eating ‘burfis of almond and golden brown gur’ to wearing an amulet around her neck she does everything without complaining or stating her opinion. A schema reinforcement is therefore activated through a variety of textual triggers, which are constantly related as the confirmation is stereotypical (Stockwell, 2006). These beliefs and superstitions of Pakistani people (Farooq & Kayani, 2012) represented by Abdullah through her characterization of Amma present the image of deep-rooted patriarchy the culture of unconscious repression of women which is later declared to be the opposite of the beliefs of her mother-in-law. However, deep inside the heart of the young protagonist of this narrative, she knows none of these tricks are going to help and her mother-in-law is only cheating herself. “She had doubts about both methodologies” her and her mother-in-law’s, this is the hint towards Tannu’s secret knowledge of the subject, that it was because of her husband that she was not able to conceive. Knowing such a secret, she did not dare speak her heart out, she could not even admit this reality to herself.

By reading this simple background of Tanus’s character the reader comes to know that the psychological repression of Tannu, her insomnia, and her invisible suffering is caused due to all these emotions and expressions which remain within her mind and soul, never to be taken out, buried deep inside only to pinch her whenever she listened to Amma complaining or trying a new totem on her. While her mother-in-law is blaming her for not having a grandchild her husband stays disconnected and she suffers alone, taking all the blows without an angry word which remains within. From a schema theory perspective, schema refreshment occurs as a schema change which is equivalent to tuning, here a schema is revised so it can be inferred that men can have biological issues but in a patriarchal setup, society demands to hide it and blame the women in every case.

### **11.3. Victim Blaming and Self Perception Schema**

Tannu’s thoughts of wishing her mother not to marry her off in haste reflect victimization and trigger the readers’ schema which can be perceived as victim blaming and self-perception. Despite all the insulting gestures of Amma and her control over her life Tannu solely blamed her mother for her miserable life and unhappiness. Such poisonous thoughts were the most painful as she would dream

Only if her Maa had not married her off so hastily, she would still be home amidst friends, living her childhood, not worrying about a new life to come when she herself had not let go of her own youth (Abdullah, 2005, p. 2).

The internalization of gender roles is shown in Tannu's tendency to blame her mother rather than Amma. In Pakistan and many other patriarchal societies, women are institutionalized to accept their conditions as inherent or the outcome of other women's actions. Readers familiar with gender dynamics in this type of community would identify this internalization as psychological abuse in which Tannu is made to feel that her pain is her own fault. Tannu is victimizing herself by thinking that her mother should not married her off so soon. This instance falls under the category of schema reinforcement (Stockwell, 2002) as it reinforces the reader's already constructed notions regarding the early marriage of women in Pakistani society. Chodorow emphasized most in her theorization of feminist psychoanalysis on the relationship between mother and daughter which according to her is the real reason for her gender identification, and development, and affects the personalities not only at earlier but later stages of their lives (Chodorow, 1994, p. 15). Tannu could not hold her words and emotions any longer when Amma told her that "if Wali Baba's talisman doesn't work, we will have to go to Shah Daulah's shrine" the words may not be so cruel, but she understood what it meant. Abdullah (2005) through a historical explanation elaborated the concept that "Shah Daulah's shrine was the place where people desperate to have offspring, went to pray to be fruitful" (p. 4). Any such prayer came with the promise of handing over a 'firstborn child' to the shrine caretakers. Even though the idea of giving away your first beloved child to a total stranger is unacceptable, such rituals are brutal and barbaric as all the children left at the shrine grow with abnormalities. This instance refers to schema disruption as it is a conceptual deviance arising from the fact that people in Pakistani society do visit shrines to get their prayers answered but handing over your firstborn child to the shrine caretakers is an unusual and hidden aspect which is uncovered in the narrative (Stockwell, 2006).

Tannu could not bear the thought of her firstborn being torn away from her, only to become a beggar, an abnormal being. When she imagined her unborn and unconceived baby as an abnormal beggar "the thought sent chills down Tannu's spine" and she asked herself an essential question "Could she give up her offspring to those wolves?" she could not stand the thought and image in her mind, she snapped and said 'sharply' "I will not go to that shrine ever" (Abdullah, 2005, p. 4). This textual reference triggers schema preservation as the incoming facts regarding motherly instinct fit into our existing schematic knowledge and it is used in our everyday discourse (Stockwell, 2006).



**11.4. Impact of Patriarchal Schemas on Tannu's Desires**

As the story moves forward, Tanu's intense emotions become clear and emphasize her desire to be freed from confinement. As a result, readers' preconceived notions about female oppression might get triggered and hence are termed as patriarchal schemas. In the narrative, the oppressive environment suggests that the unconscious of Tannu was trying to break through her consciousness, as the pain and suffering exceeded the limits of her patience. She was conscious of her desire for freedom, her repression and her unhappy married life. The next day when the milkman came, they touched each other.

Her insides were alive with forbidden emotions, luscious longing, and a racing heart that wanted just one thing- to drape her arms around this stranger and allow him to free her of her cruel existence, to steal her away to some distant land where she did not have to worry about her barren state anymore (Abdullah, 2005, p. 9).

Tannu's strong feelings and desire to flee with the milkman can be interpreted as a direct response to the psychological trauma she experiences in her present life. Tannu's illicit sexual fantasies for a man other than her husband is an example of schema replacement as such kind of behavior is not acceptable in Pakistani culture. Tannu's moral transgressions outside of her marriage in the form of her committing adultery and forbidden sexual thoughts refer to a radical narrative disjunction. The sensual advances of her husband were intolerable for Tannu as she resented her husband, a weak person who could not satisfy her and could not protect her from all the suffering. Tannu's lack of interest in her husband and her detachment in the most intimate moments as she "started counting the ticking of Raja's clock" (Abdullah, 2005, p. 14). Chodorow discovers that hysteria in women of different backgrounds has a similar cause that is related to sexual repression or unwanted sexual advances (Chodorow, 1994, p. 13). Other psychological disorders such as obsession are also derived from unfulfilled sexual desires as Freud saw women as sexual objects rather than objects.

The lack of emotional involvement and Tannu's detachment represent her emotional unavailability, the intimacy did not go beyond her consciousness, and therefore despite being physically available for her husband, she was emotionally very distant. The willful surrender of Tannu and her detachment was one of her ways to cope with sexual and psychological repression while it was one of her ways to resist and show her lack of interest in her marriage or relationship openly. Her detachment in the relationship is also one way of resistance as silence is one of the most meaningful tools of resistance used by the abused

and repressed (Glenn, 2002). That month “her biological clock had failed” and Amma declared that Tannu’s next child would be a boy, instead of talking about the one which was already flourishing inside Tannu’s womb as “the fate of the unborn child was already sealed” (Abdullah, 2005, p. 16). This again refers to schema reinforcement as having the desire for a male child is deeply rooted in the patriarchal Pakistani culture which is being expressed here.

### **11.5. Insomnia as a Manifestation of Psychological Abuse**

Tannu’s inability to sleep in the psychological world is called ‘insomnia’. Tamanna and Geraci (2013) identified insomnia as one of the major sleep disorders among women. They further identified insomnia symptoms as “difficulty falling asleep, maintaining sleep and/or early morning awakening” (Tamanna & Geraci, 2013, p. 470). All these symptoms are quite apparent in the case of Tannu as not only does she have difficulty sleeping but she also faces a lot of difficulties maintaining her sleep. The following study also claimed that all forms of sleep disorders are more common among women as compared to men. So, when readers look at Tannu’s sleeping difficulty and establish a link with her psychological state, a literal approach typically occurs which challenges the reader’s schemata and is known as schema disruption (Stockwell, 2006). However, being a patient with a sleeping disorder, and insomnia, Tannu remains unnoticed not only by her husband but her mother-in-law, her husband’s “widowed mother” who sleeps as well on the other side of the curtain. The contrastive image of the husband’s ‘baby sleep’ in comparison to his wife’s state of Insomnia is quite suggestive of their emotional distance and unsatisfactory situation for Tannu. Because of her emotional neglect and the harsh environment, she lives in, Tannu’s sleeplessness can be interpreted as a direct consequence of her circumstances. Readers can create a link between mental health and psychological abuse and thus internalize the sleep disturbances as a manifestation of stress, anxiety and helplessness, Tannu feels due to her repressive circumstances.

From the very start of the story readers come to know that Tannu has a sleeping disorder, insomnia, however when she wakes up after the most disturbing dream, she finds herself under a tree, ‘soaked in dew’ “she was “few yards away” from her house. She is unable to remember or understand what it means as she “looked around in bewilderment and shivered” asking herself the same question readers ask, “how she ended up outside?” even though she tries to understand her presence under that tree she knows exactly what happened as she asks herself “had she been sleepwalking again” (Abdullah, 2005, p. 9). Tannu did not only suffer from insomnia, but she was a sleepwalker, which explains much

more about her psychological state of mind. Sleepwalking is a psychological disorder, which is directly linked to the unconsciousness of a patient. In the case of Tannu, the use of the word ‘again’ shows that it was not a new experience and she had suffered from this disorder in her past she further recalls her childhood as she was a sleepwalker and at times her mother “would search for her daughter in the early morning hours only to find her sleeping on the bench in the cornfield or on soft leaves near the riverbank. Tannu would recall none of this” (Abdullah, 2005, p. 9). Tannu's sleepwalking may be perceived by readers who have schemas related to psychiatric problems as a reflection of her suppressed feelings and unresolved trauma.

## **12. Conclusion**

The present study applies cognitive poetics to Pakistani short stories, arguing that they offer valuable insights into the psychological abuse of protagonists within the patriarchal structures of Pakistani society, which is an underexplored area and requires further scholarly attention. This research combines schema theory and psychoanalytic feminist theory drawing on Nancy Chodorow's (1994) interpretation of Freud's theory of unconscious. The results showed that readers draw upon their pre-existing schemas, formed by past knowledge and experiences, to analyze the psychological impact of patriarchal oppression on women, in the selected text. A schema-based method of literary analysis emphasizes how these schemas influence the readers' interpretation of the text. The study also highlighted the significance of marriage, and the responsibilities imposed on women through Tannu's characterization. Consequently, the study significantly contributed to the field by examining how people with different cultural backgrounds, experiences with gender roles, and awareness of psychological abuse might internalize patriarchal standards within Pakistani society.

In a nutshell, this study highlights the value of applying cognitive poetics in combination with psychoanalytic feminist theory to analyze Pakistani short stories. This approach offers deeper insights into the psychological abuse endured by female protagonists within patriarchal structures. Hence, the current study demonstrates how cognitive poetic tools like schema theory enhance the understanding of hidden linguistic patterns and psychological dynamics by focusing on *Amulet for the Caged Dove*. Through this interdisciplinary approach, cognitive poetics has transcended its conventional bounds, enabled a deeper exploration of gender and societal themes while also emphasized the role of readers' prior knowledge on their textual understanding. The study advocates a wider application of cognitive poetics across various literary texts and traditions. It encourages

the integration of this approach with other theoretical frameworks such as postcolonial and feminist theories, to yield deeper literary insights. This research has significant implications for connecting literary studies with cognitive science, promoting interdisciplinary discussions, and offering educators and analysts with enhanced insights into reader engagement with texts. Future research should delve into cognitive poetics within a variety of genres and global literatures. It is also important to incorporate empirical methods to validate theoretical claims and to use digital humanities tools to enhance cognitive analyses on a broader scale. By pursuing these avenues, researchers can significantly advance the field of cognitive poetics and enhance our understanding of how literature intersects with the human mind.

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